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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000569

STATE FOR AF/E, PRM/AFR, S/CRS AND USAID
ADDIS ABABA FOR REFCOORD
NAIROBI FOR RDRAPCHO AND REFCOORD

GENEVA FOR KPERKINS
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SENSITIVE
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TAGS: [PREF](#) [SMIG](#) [EAID](#) [SO](#) [ET](#) [DJ](#) [XA](#)
SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI FACES NEW REFUGEE INFLUX CHALLENGES

REF: A) DJIBOUTI 550
B) DJIBOUTI 442
C) DJIBOUTI 439
D) DJIBOUTI 437
E) DJIBOUTI 425 (NOTAL)

¶1. SUMMARY: The Chargee and the Refugee Officer met with representatives from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the National Office of Assistance to Refugees and Disaster Stricken People (ONARS) to discuss the challenges Djibouti faces associated with the recent Djibouti-Eritrea border conflict as it continues to struggle in addressing the South/Central Somali refugee influx. END SUMMARY.

¶2. On June 15, Chargee and the Refugee Officer met with Ann Encontre, Representative for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Hassan Omar, Secretary General of Interior and the Director of ONARS. ONARS is the National Office of Assistance to Refugees and Disaster Stricken People, which is the Government of Djibouti (GoDJ) office in charge of refugee affairs. They discussed the challenges Djibouti continues to face with the Somalia refugee influx from South and Central Somalia, and the recent Eritrea/Djibouti border conflictQs affect on refugees.

MIGRANTS CAUGHT IN CROSS FIRE

¶3. Migrants from Somalia reportedly continue to transit through Djibouti in an effort to make their way to Yemen via the northern territory of Djibouti. Hassan Omar reported that, on June 10, during the Djibouti-Eritrea clash, 72 terrified migrants from South Somalia sought refuge near the Djiboutian army. The migrants were reportedly hiding nearby waiting for an opportunity to cross the sea to Yemen. The GoDJ transferred the migrants to Obock in the care of ObockQs Commissioner.

FEARED IMPACT OF THE BORDER DISPUTE ON REFUGEE INFLUX

¶4. Hassan Omar and Representative Encontre both stated that the Government of Eritrea ordered UNHCR to leave the country by the end of 2008. However, a USG source has confirmed that UNHCR will remain in Eritrea. Nevertheless, if UNHCR departs Eritrea, both

representatives fear the possibility of an estimated 5,000 to 8,000 South Somali refugees may begin a massive movement towards Djibouti, seeking refugee. Hassan Omar reported that the GoDJ has failed to begin planning for this possibility of new refugees from Eritrea's refugee camp.

15. Another feared possibility of a new influx comes from the Afar people, who live along the shore of southeastern Eritrea. People from this tribe also live in northeastern Djibouti. Even though they live in separate countries, they share the same Sultan, who lives on the Djiboutian side of the border. The Afar population living on the Eritrean side of the border traditionally preferred to purchase basic commodities in Djiboutian villages, due to the distance of larger Eritrean cities and villages. If fighting between Djibouti and Eritrea resumes, Hassan Omar expects this population to also seek refuge in Djibouti.

16. The GoDJ reportedly evacuated 352 people from the area around Moulhoule, a small town in Djibouti near the border dispute. These internally displaced persons (IDP) have received temporary shelter in the town of Khor-Angar, 230 km northeast from Djiboutiville. ONARS and UNHCR are working together to provide limited assistance to this displaced population. The GoDJ, taken by surprise, had not made any plans for an internal population movement, and ONARS fears more people from the region may become IDPs if the fighting resumes.

DJIBOUTI 00000569 002 OF 002

SOMALIA'S INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

17. Hassan Omar also reported on a newly encountered situation ONARS faces where South/Central Somali refugees, who have been in Somaliland for the past two years or less, have begun seeking refuge in Djibouti. This new influx of refugees has claimed that UNHCR in Hargeisa refused to recognize their refugee status (COMMENT: UNHCR in Hargeisa can only identify these individuals as IDPs because Somaliland is internationally recognized as part of Somalia. END COMMENT). Hassan Omar believes many of these people come to Djibouti with the hope of being resettled to a western country. Upon hearing this, Encontre stated that UNHCR Djibouti does not give priority for resettlement to Somalis.

REFUGEE RECEPTION AT THE BORDER DISCONTINUED

18. Currently, there is an estimated 2,500 registered new arrivals from South Somalia. (COMMENT: An estimated 8,500 refugees reside at the Ali Addeh camp. END COMMENT). An estimated 6,000 unregistered migrants roam Djiboutiville waiting for assistance from the GoDJ. Since UNCHR has yet to establish a presence to register incoming refugees at the Loyada border, ONARS discontinued its daily refugee pick-ups at the border. Nevertheless, reception, screening, and registration of refugees continues at ONARSQ office in Djiboutiville, a venue not originally designed to receive or hold the large numbers of people it currently serves.

19. Representative Encontre stated that even though the Ministry of Interior provided permission to construct the reception in the no mans land between Djibouti and Somaliland, the Ministry of Defense objected to the construction. When she returns from a regional meeting in Nairobi next week, EnContre plans to seek an explanation of the rejection from the

Ministry of Defense.

UNHCR'S SUPPLIES REDISTRIBUTED TO DISASTER STRICKEN
COUNTRIES

¶10. EnContre reported that UNHCR Djibouti received a portion of its long awaited supplies (non-food items, vehicles, etc.) ordered under last year's contingency plan, which had been set up to face the refugee influx from Southern Somalia and a possible war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The goods intended for the latter arrived in Dubai, but were redistributed to assist Myanmar and China with their recent disasters. UNHCR must now wait for an additional 8-10 months before the supplies are available again. Encontre thanked the U.S. Government for the USD 100,000 contribution that has helped finance the supplies.

¶11. COMMENT: The volatile situation in the Horn of Africa, further confirmed by this latest conflict between Eritrea and Djibouti, has started to affect Djibouti. If threats continue to materialize, more serious impacts on Djibouti's refugee handling are to be expected. Post closely monitors UNHCR and ONARS preparedness and responses to address the issues, both present and future. END COMMENT

LIST